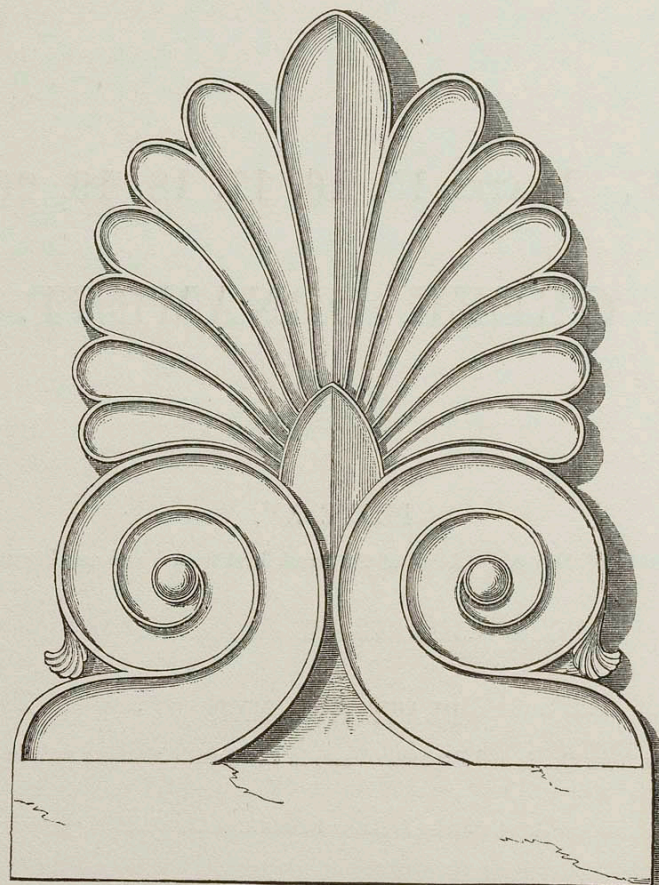
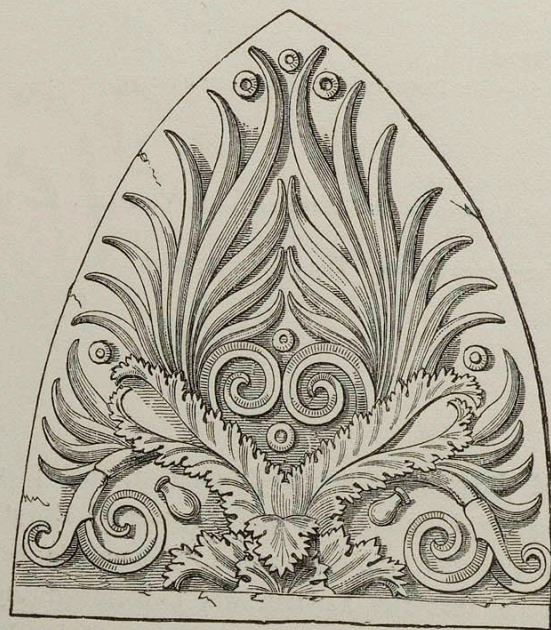


GREEK ORNAMENT.

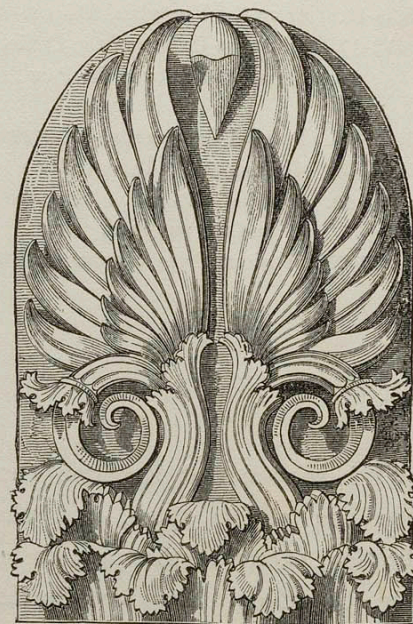
to have been both the Assyrian and the Egyptian, Greek Art rose rapidly to a high state of perfection, from which it was itself able to give forth the elements of future greatness to other styles. It carried



Termination of the Marble Tiles of the Parthenon. L. VULLIAMY.



Upper part of a Stelo. L. VULLIAMY.



The upper part of a Stelo. L. VULLIAMY.

the perfection of pure form to a point which has never since been reached; and from the very abundant remains we have of Greek ornament, we must believe the presence of refined taste was

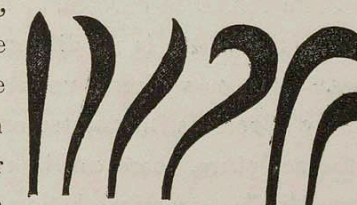
GREEK ORNAMENT.

almost universal, and that the land was overflowing with artists, whose hands and minds were so trained as to enable them to execute these beautiful ornaments with unerring truth.

Greek ornament was wanting, however, in one of the great charms which should always accompany ornament,—viz. Symbolism. It was meaningless, purely decorative, never representative, and can hardly be said to be constructive; for the various members of a Greek monument rather present surfaces exquisitely designed to receive ornament, which they did, at first, painted, and in later times both carved and painted. The ornament was no part of the construction, as with the Egyptian: it could be removed, and the structure remained unchanged. On the Corinthian capital the ornament is applied, not constructed: it is not so on the Egyptian capital; there we feel the whole capital is the ornament,—to remove any portion of it would destroy it.

However much we admire the extreme and almost divine perfection of the Greek monumental sculpture, in its application the Greeks frequently went beyond the legitimate bounds of ornament. The frieze of the Parthenon was placed so far from the eye that it became a diagram: the beauties which so astonish us when seen near the eye could only have been valuable so far as they evidenced the artist-worship which cared not that the eye saw the perfection of the work if conscious that it was to be found there: but we are bound to consider this an abuse of means, and that the Greeks were in this respect inferior to the Egyptians, whose system of incavo relievo for monumental sculpture appears to us the more perfect.

The examples of representative ornament are very few, with the exception of the wave ornament and the fret used to distinguish water from land in their pictures, and some conventional renderings of trees, as at No. 12, Plate XXI., we have little that can deserve this appellation, but of decorative ornament the Greek and Etruscan vases supply us with abundant materials; and as the painted ornaments of the Temples, which have as yet been discovered in no way differ from them, we have little doubt that we are acquainted with Greek ornament in all its phases. Like the Egyptian the types are few, but the conventional rendering is much further removed from the types. In the well-known honeysuckle ornament it is difficult to recognise any attempt at imitation, but rather an appreciation of the principle on which the flower grows; and, indeed, on examining the paintings on the vases, we are rather tempted to believe that the various forms of the leaves of a Greek flower have been generated by the brush of the painter, according as the hand is turned upwards or downwards in the formation of the leaf would the character be given, and it is more likely that the slight resemblance to the honeysuckle may have been an after recognition than that the natural flower should have ever served as the model. In Plate XCIX. will be found a representation



of the honeysuckle: and how faint indeed is the resemblance. What is evident is, that the Greeks in their ornament were close observers of nature, and although they did not copy, or attempt to imitate, they worked on the same principles. The three great laws which we find everywhere in nature—radiation from the parent stem, proportionate distribution of the areas, and the tangential curvature of the lines—are always obeyed, and it is the unerring perfection with which they are, in the most humble works as in the highest, which excites our astonishment, and which is only fully realised on attempting to reproduce Greek ornament, so rarely done with success. A very characteristic feature of Greek ornament, continued by the Romans, but abandoned during the Byzantine period, is, that the various parts of a scroll grow out of each other in a continuous line, as the ornament from the Choragic Monument of Lysicrates.

In the Byzantine, the Arabian Moorsque, and Early English styles, the flowers flow off on either side from a continuous line. We have here an instance how slight a change in any